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## **Sing Two Stanzas and Rebel in the Morning: The Role of Black Religious Music in the Struggle for Freedom**

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As a teacher in the Talented and Gifted Program, I have developed several curriculum units that teach the struggles of both voluntary and involuntary immigrants to the United States. Through the use of Constitutional Law, I have introduced my seventh grade students to various groups of people who have found themselves displaced in America and disenfranchised by deferred dreams.

This year I would like to add another dimension to my presently existing curriculum. I would like to give students an opportunity to explore the struggles of black people through their music. Beginning with the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in Jamestown, Virginia in 1619, one can begin to trace a musical genre developed by Africans that shows their displeasure in this country. This music also served as a form of “double speak” that was undetectable by whites.

Africans who were kidnapped from their homes and brought to this country were often scholars, explorers, tradesmen, royalty, but most importantly, free men. The situation in which they found themselves was unbearable. They had hopes of being free and very often sang about physical freedom in the context of religious songs. In certain situations, the enslaved African sang about his God, the deliverer, and the day that he would go to heaven to live with Him. Sometimes the same song could take on an alternate meaning and would show the African’s longing and possible plan for freedom in the north. Many white enslavers felt comfortable and secure when they heard enslaved Africans singing about stealing away to Jesus. In the enslaver’s ignorance, he thought the Africans were singing about a better life in heaven. The enslaver was not aware that the Africans were not necessarily looking forward to the day that they would steal away to Jesus, The Christ, but to the ship named “Jesus” that would take them to freedom.

It is my assertion that both religious and secular music in the black community served as a form of “therapy”. Black people were able to face their situations and to articulate their troubles, hopes, solutions and protests in song. Although the lyrics of religious songs spoke of God, Heaven and Jesus, they were still a means of expressing injustice and promoting emotional health within the community.

In this unit, I will discuss the music of the black church and it’s role in the life and well-being of America’s Africans. In particular, this unit will present a discussion of negro spirituals and the protest songs of the civil rights movement.

My unit will also contain a historical element. In order to understand the music, it is important to have

knowledge of those who have produced it. In this vein, I have attempted to present little-known information about the pre-slavery African, his exploits and his religion. This information is relevant in one's attempt to understand a people who could survive the grueling middle passage. Not only did they survive in spite of the endless work, poor living conditions, lack of adequate food and clothing, lynchings, beatings, rapes and the auctioning of husbands, wives and babies; they also sang. They sang in their early "invisible churches" about the God who delivered Daniel. They found hope and the ability to face their "blues" when they "Africanized" Christianity and its stories of deliverance. They knew that the God of the Israelite was also the God of the African. They knew this God well. They celebrated this God in circle dances and songs in Africa and they believed He would sustain them until He led them safely out of "Egypt", (slavery in the south) into the promised land (freedom in the north or death).

Because the black church was a meeting place sanctioned by unsuspecting slave-holders, blacks were able to secretly discuss through songs, plans for escape and rebellion. Since whites underestimated the intelligence of the African, slaves were able to plot and scheme right under their noses. Their desire and plan for freedom was neatly tucked away in the lyrics of the songs they sang in the presence of their captors. They allowed their enslavers to think that they were ignorant and content, while singing and using the white man's arrogance and ignorance against him.

During the civil rights movement of the 1960's, the church again arises as a meeting place to strategize, sing and pray. Unlike many songs in the 19th century freedom movement, songs of protest were sung openly in the black church. The lyrics no longer contained double meanings to keep whites ignorant, but were direct, clear of purpose and filled with a spirit of discontent.

My lesson plans will provide students an opportunity to write songs in the spiritual and gospel traditions. They will be able to discuss the societal issues that fostered changes in black religious music. Students will read about various historical events and examine the music that paralleled those events.

### **Black African Explorers in the New World:**

It is a common belief that the first Africans in the Americas were the twenty captured Africans who arrived on a Dutch man-of-war in Jamestown in 1619. Evidence supports the arrival of Africans in the Americas hundreds of years before white Europeans. African explorers and guides travelled throughout the New World with French and Spanish explorers. An African named Estevanico served as scout and interpreter for Panfilo de Narvaez in both The Gulf of Mexico and Florida in 1527. Estevanico was captured by Native Americans but managed to escape. He lived in the Southwest for several years and went on several expeditions to New Mexico and Arizona in 1539. The Zuni had never seen an African before and believed Estevanico to be a God. The people of the Zuni tribe brought him gifts of precious stones such as turquoise. He was later killed by a group of Zuni warriors.

In his book *They Came Before Columbus*, Ivan Van Sertima presents evidence of the African presence in the Americas hundreds of years before Columbus. Distinctly African artifacts, maritime studies and the "Olmec Heads" with their distinct African features, dispel any doubt of the early arrival of Africans in the New World. There are also Spanish accounts of black skinned people who were seen in Columbia and Peru hundreds of years before the fifteenth century Europeans.

Van Sertima's presentation of an intelligent, scholarly, adventurous, respected, revered, proud, and resourceful black people, differs greatly from the images and history taught in most American classrooms. When the African is presented to our students, he is portrayed as illiterate, heathenistic, broken and shackled.

It is Van Sertima's assertion that racial prejudice has denied the masses access to this important, life changing information.

According to Van Sertima, anthropologists have discovered distinctive black settlements that appear along the American seaboard. These settlements appear outside of the post-Columbian slave complexes and present evidence of a pre-Columbian Africa/America connection. There have also been discoveries of realistic portrayures of black Africans in clay and gold. These discoveries were made in pre-Columbian strata in both Central and South America.

In 1862, a huge granite head depicting a black man was discovered in the Canton of Tuxla. This granite head was found near the place where the most ancient pre-Columbian statuettes were found. Because of modern methods of dating, we now know that many of the stone heads depicting blacks found among the Olmecs and in other parts of Mexico and Central America date as far back as 800 to 700 B.C.

Ivan Van Sertima presents information concerning King Abubakari The Second. Documents in Cairo tell of his expedition into the Atlantic in 1311. He led a fleet of large boats that were well stocked with food and water and left the Senegambia coast which is on the western border of Mali in West Africa. Of the two fleets that set sail, only one ship returned. A captain from the fleet that set sail before Abubakri described "a river in the middle of the sea". Although neither of these two Mandingo fleets returned to Mali, a combination of artifacts and cultural parallels were found in the strata of Mexico during the corresponding time period. A dark skinned outsider is portrayed in paintings in the Mexico valleys and the Aztecs began worshipping a "Negroid " figure they thought to be their god Tezcatlipoca.

### **African Religion and Music:**

In "The Power Of Black Music", by Sammuel A. Floyd Jr., one acquires a clear understanding of the relationship between religion and society at large in Africa. Floyd presents the findings of John S. Mbiti in his study of African religion. According to Mbiti, although there are more than three thousand African ethnic groups, each with its own religious system, it is still possible to discuss the African concept of God as a unit. Mbiti has found that in religion in Africa, there are basic elements and fundamental concepts that are common throughout the continent. He feels it is therefore possible to speak of an African religion.

According to Floyd, without exception, all African societies have a notion of God. Much like the God of the Christian, the African's God is a High God, Father, King, Master, Lord, Judge, Ruler and in some matriarchal societies, Mother. God is known as the provider and creator and reigns from heaven and is over the heaven and the earth. Africans respect and honor him and are to be humble before him.

Floyd asserts that in traditional African culture there is no word for religion because the religion of the African was the basis for all aspects of his/her life. Because religion permeated everyday life, African religion was not dogmatic, but it manifested itself as ideas and practices that governed the lives of the people. Africans, according to Mbiti, believed in the existence of other spirits or divinities, but African generally worship one God. Mbiti notes that in a few cases dual or trinitarian ideas of God existed, but Africans generally worshipped God, the One.

Other common characteristics of African religion are lesser gods. These lesser gods are viewed as mythological figures that have a spiritual nature. The spirit world was not only inhabited by the lesser gods but also by the living-dead and ordinary spirits. The living dead are the ancestors who are still remembered by those who are living, while the ordinary spirits are those who are no longer named among, nor remembered

by those who are alive. It was the African's belief that the spirits could intervene in human affairs and could intercede on behalf of their descendants.

Another feature in African culture that will prove important to our study of Black religious music in the U.S., is the legacy of trickster tales. In animal trickster stories we find a scheming, outrageous, figure who usually takes on the form of a spider, monkey, rabbit, or fox. These stories show the trickster entering a situation and upsetting things. The trickster creates a dramatic contrast that inevitably leads to chaos. The resolve in these tales usually comes through some form of accommodation. The double meaning in many early slave songs are consistent with the trickster tales' use of deception, revenge and escape.

### **The Songs of Africa:**

Music scholar, Alan Lomax, found a homogeneity in the style of the Africans' songs. Lomax found African music to have a leader oriented style, to be relaxed, multileveled and cohesive. The prevailing style of song for the African was call and response. In this form, there was a leader who would sing a particular set of lyrics, and the group would respond. African music was polyrhythmic, spirited and carried on "conversations." Drums played an integral part in this music and some African music experts view the drum and song as a unit. Lomax found this same musical form to be present from the Cape of Good Hope to the Straits of Gibraltar and definitely in the American colonies.

Sammuel Floyd writes that an understanding of Drum and Song as a unit is essential in properly studying the transformation of African music into what is now African-American music. He suggests that myths, tales, and legends are both inspirational and material for African music. He further asserts that the aforementioned also drive the rituals and ceremonies in which the music is used. In many ceremonies the ring dance was performed. The activities in the ring were strictly controlled by selected members of the community, inclusive of dance chiefs, line and drum leaders. There was a primary objective for the ceremony and dance, drums, songs, myths, and masks worked together to form a very complicated network. This network reinforced a sense of unity within the African community. According to Floyd, the regulation of the drum, dance and song of the African was central to the success of the ritual being performed.

Although the songs brought to the U.S. by Africans bore a distinctive style as noted above, it also served distinctive purposes. J.H. Kwabena Nketia notes in *The Music of Africa*, that Africans treat songs like "speech utterances". This musical communication was usually inspired by their personal and social experiences.

When Africans were brought to the U.S. in 1619 on slave ships, their enslavers were careful when possible, to separate countrymen for fear of communication and impending revolts. White slave ship captains did not understand that the Africans were able to communicate with each other through their music. Through the rhythm used in their songs they were able to share their feelings of sorrow, uncertainty and hopelessness. Also, through the rhythm of their makeshift drums, they were able to call their Black brothers to revolt. For awhile, the ignorant white enslaver did not realize that the drums were being used for communication. They knew the sound of the drumbeats carried to neighboring plantations, but were unaware of the development and preservation of a "code" used to make plans for revolts and escapes. When it became apparent that the drums were being used as a form of communication, they were outlawed. The spirited African would not allow this to stop him, and he began to send messages with his feet. Back in Africa, in the absence of drums, some tribes had learned to tap out rhythms with the heels of their feet on sun-baked clay. In America, they did the same thing on the floors of their huts or on the boards of their dancing floors.

## Slave Songs and Double Speak:

Many songs sung by enslaved blacks on southern plantations were songs of sorrow, hope, love, folly, God and rebellion. In actuality, many of these songs spoke of escape from slavery and often served as a mode of communication between the escaped slave and the soon to escape slave. In *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, written in 1869, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, writes that a Black soldier once told him that in the Black Spirituals, "The Lord" meant the Yankee soldiers and the Potomac River, not the Jordan, was the "one more river to cross."

Enslaved Africans chose their Christian texts carefully and infused them with

African traditions. Their songs were filled with repetitive choruses and call and response. Some of the spirituals alluded to African folktales. The mighty Jordan, a phrase used frequently in Black religious songs, is reminiscent of the many rivers in Africa as well as a concept of death. In *Crossing The Danger Waters*, Deirdre Mullane writes that in many spirituals, the devil is said to be a liar and a "conjurer too." Also, the lyrics "The Devil's mad and I'm glad, he lost the soul he thought he had" is typical of the trickster tales from Africa in which the one deemed less powerful, triumphs over their more powerful enemy.

When entertaining the notion of a double meaning in the religious songs of the slave, one is forced to examine the lyrics of spirituals more closely. As mentioned earlier, the religious songs of the enslaved African served a social/emotional as well as spiritual role. According to James Haskins in *Black Music In America*, the song "Deep River," for example, was used to announce a meeting at the river:

Deep river  
My home is over Jordan, yes  
Deep river, Lord,  
I want to cross over into camp ground.

Haskins further writes that when a slave had run away and his absence was discovered by his enslaver, the other slaves on the plantation might sing "*Wade in the Water*." Those enslaved on neighboring plantations would begin to sing the song also to alert the runaway. He or she would be reminded to travel in the shallow waters of the river where the bloodhounds could not pick up his scent.

Wade in the water, wade in the water children.  
Wade in the water, God's gonna trouble the water.

According to Haskins, as the Underground Railroad developed to take escaped blacks to freedom, many enslaved blacks in the south began to sing a spiritual called, "*Git on Board Little Chillen*" or "*The Gospel Train*." Some of the lyrics noted by Haskins are:

Git on board, little chillen,  
Git on board, little chillen,  
Git on board, little chillen,  
Dere's room for many a mo'.

The Gospel train is coming

I hear it just at hand-  
I hear the car wheels moving,  
And- rumbling thro' the land.  
Get on board- children,  
Get on board.

In 1867, Allen, Ware, and Garrison compiled and published over one hundred secular and religious slave songs. For many of these songs, the authors provided an explanation for their usage. For example, a song entitled "*Good-Bye Brother*," is said to refer to the death of a fellow soldier. In keeping with the double meaning of many slave songs, this song could also be used to give comfort to a loved one who had decided to escape to freedom.

Good-bye brother, good-bye brother, If I don't see you more;  
Now God bless you, now God bless you, If I don't see you more.

We part in the body but we meet in the spirit,

We'll meet in de heaben in de blessed kingdom.

So good-bye, brother, goodbye, sister;

Now god bless you, now God bless you.

The following song, titled “ *Good-bye* ”, also suggest the duping of observing whites. Mrs. Charles J. Bowen explains in *Slave Songs* that this song is sung at the conclusion of a meeting. While shaking one another’s hands, they pronounce one another’s names. She ends the description by stating that it is very confusing.

Good-bye my brudder, good-bye, Hallelujah!  
Good-bye, sister Sally, Good-bye Hallelujah!  
Going home, Hallelujah! Jesus call me, Hallelujah!  
Linger no longer, Hallelujah! Tarry no longer, Hallelujah!

To Mrs. Bowen, this song was simply a good-night song, but the song lends itself nicely to a secret means of informing those scheduled for the next train to freedom. Those called by name could be the ones selected as passengers.

In, *Somebody’s Calling My Name* , Wyatt Walker presents the views of researchers Harold Courlander and Hildred Roach on the use of *double entendre* in slave songs. According to Walker, both researchers agree that the double meaning did not always signal a desire to escape from slavery, although that was often the case. Roach asserts that these songs showed an obsession with “freedom land” but the meaning of Jesus is a bit ambiguous. Jesus, in the slave song, could mean “The Christ” of Christianity; Ntoa, the supernatural spirits of the ancestors; or Harriet Tubman of the Underground Railroad. Depending upon the circumstances and the singer, Canaan could mean Heaven, a better life in the north or freedom. There were many religious songs that had political meanings. Most specialists in the study of spirituals agree that these songs were as adaptable as the people who created them. They allowed Black people to commune with their God, to communicate messages about rebellions and escape, or to bring comfort to those who had decided to stay in servitude. A few of these politically infused spirituals are *Joshua Fit de Battle of Jerico*, *Steal Away*, *Deep River*, *O Mary*, *Don’t You Weep*, *Don’t You Mourn and Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel?*

#### *Joshua Fit the Battle of Jerico*

Joshua fit de battle of Jerico, Jerico, Jerico,  
Joshua fit the battle of Jerico,  
An’ de walls come tumblin’ down.

You may talk about yo’ king ob Gideon;

You may talk about yo’ man ob Saul;  
Dere’s none like good ole Joshua

At de battle of Jerico.

Up to the walls ob Jerico

He marched with spear in han'  
"Go blow dem ram horns," Joshua cried,  
"Kase de battle am in my han'."

Den de lam ram sheep horns begin to blow;

Trumpets begin to sound.  
Joshua commanded de chillen to shout  
An the walls come tumblin' down.

*Steal Away*

Steal away, steal away,  
Steal away to Jesus!  
Steal away, steal away home,  
I ain't got long to stay here.

My Lord calls me,

He calls me by the thunder;  
The trumpet sounds within my soul,  
I ain't got long to stay here.



*Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?*

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel,  
Deliver Daniel, deliver Daniel,  
Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel,  
An' why not every man?

He delivered Daniel fom de lion's den,

Jonah from de belly of de whale,  
An' de Hebrew children from de fiery furnace,  
An' why not every man?

*Deep River*

Deep River,  
My home is over Jordan,  
Deep River, Lord,  
I want to cross over into campground.

Oh don't you want to go

To that gospel feast,  
That promised land  
Where all is peace?

*O Mary, Don't You Weep, Don't You Mourn*

O Mary, don't you weep, don't you mourn,  
O Mary, don't you weep, don't you mourn,  
Pharaoh's army got drowned,  
O Mary, don't you weep.

Some of these mornings bright and fair,

Take my wings and cleave the air,  
Pharaoh's army got drowned,  
O Mary, don't you weep.

*Roll, Jordan, Roll*

Roll, Jordan, Roll  
Roll, Jordan, Roll  
I want to go to heav'n when I die  
To hear Jordan roll.

O brothers, you ought to have been there;

Yes my Lord, A-sittin' in the kingdom  
To hear Jordan roll.

Although many slave songs possessed a double meaning, many songs sung by enslaved blacks in America were clear in their expression of displeasure. In "*My Father How Long?*" blacks were clear about their desire to be free. Although the lyrics mention "de New Jerusalem" and speak of being called home by the Lord, it was quite apparent that this religious song was not about an afterlife, but about immediate, physical freedom. During the outbreak of one of many rebellions in Georgetown, SC, Blacks were imprisoned for singing this song;

My father, how long, My father, how long,  
My father, how long, poor sinner suffer here?  
And it won't be long, and it won't be long,  
And it won't be long, and it won't be long,  
Poor sinner suffer here.

We'll soon be free

De Lord will call us home.

We'll walk de miry road

where pleasure never dies.

We'll walk de golden streets

of de New Jerusalem

We'll fight for liberty

When the Lord calls us home.

Another openly rebellious song sung by enslaved Africans was "*Many Thousand Go* ."

No more peck o' corn for me, No more, no more;  
No more peck o' corn for me, Many thousand go.

No more driver's lash for me. No more pint o' salt for me. No more hundred lash for me. No more mistress' call for me. Perhaps the most poignant song of the discontent and rebellious slave was "*Oh Freedom* ." This song contained no dual meaning and it's singing was punishable by the lash or death. This was the "theme song" if

you will, of the black rebel. He refused to be enslaved any longer and was openly willing to die for his freedom.

Oh, Oh Freedom, Oh, Oh freedom.  
Oh, Oh Freedom, over me.  
And before I'll be a slave,  
I'll be buried in my grave,  
and go home to my Lord and be free.

No more weeping, no more wailing.

No more weeping over me.  
And before I'll be a slave,  
I'll be buried in my grave.  
and go home to my Lord and be free.

### **The Civil Rights Movement:**

The Civil Rights Movement in America was born out of the continuing discontent of African-American people in the U.S. Although slavery had technically ended, one hundred years later, Black Americans were not afforded equal opportunity nor equal rights under the Constitution. Blacks were made to use separate bathroom facilities, drink from separate water fountains, attend inferior, all-black schools and forced to ride in the back of the bus. Blacks were denied voting rights and were subjected to laws that were written for the express purpose of limiting the black mans' accomplishments in America.

The civil rights movement was fueled by the arrest of Mrs. Rosa Parks. Mrs. Parks, a middle-aged black seamstress, refused to give her bus seat to a white man as ordered by the white bus driver. She was arrested and fined \$10.00. Blacks who were fed up with their unjust treatment in this country, came together to organize the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders, blacks were urged to take taxis, to carpool or walk to work and other destinations. This boycott was extremely successful, yet it took the jailing of Dr. King and many blacks who chose peaceful protest, to bring about a change through the judicial system. Two months after Dr. King had been sentenced to serve 386 days at hard labor or to pay a \$500.00 fine for encouraging blacks to walk instead of riding segregated buses, the Federal Court ruled that the segregation laws that governed city buses in Montgomery were unconstitutional and could not be enforced. Lawyers for Montgomery took the case to the Supreme court and lost again. The

highest court in the land had handed down a decision that would deal a death blow to legal discrimination based on race in the U.S.

The bus boycott was one of many battles fought in the legal system on behalf of blacks in the U.S. civil rights movement fought for voting rights, and an end to segregated schools and public accommodations. Out of this movement came the development of affirmative action programs as a means of correcting past and continuing injustices against black people in the U.S.

During the Civil Rights Movement, black people came together in their churches. Like their ancestors before them, they appealed to God for deliverance and justice. The songs of the black church did not exclude God, but many were songs written for the direct purpose of rallying people to action. These songs gave strength and courage to marchers both black and white. The marchers, though peaceful, knew their peaceful protest would be met with hatred and violence. They came to the church to pray for protection and to strategize. And they sang.

One of the most powerful songs of the movement was “ *Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around* .”

Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me around, turn me around, turn me around.  
Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me around.  
I’ve gotta keep on a walkin’, keep on a talkin’,  
Marching into freedom land.

Ain’t gonna let segregation turn me around.

Ain’t gonna let Bull Conner turn me around.

“ *We Shall Not Be Moved* ” was also a very powerful song of the Civil Rights Movement. Although written at an earlier period, this song took on a new meaning. It provoked an attitude of perseverance within the singers; and they marched on.

We shall not, we shall not be moved.  
We shall not, we shall not be moved.  
Just like a tree, planted by the water.  
We shall not be moved.

" *We Shall Overcome* " was one of Dr. King's favorite songs and became synonymous with the movement. This song reminded the marchers of their purpose and spoke of their hope.

We shall overcome.  
We shall overcome.  
We shall overcome someday.  
Deep in my heart.  
I do believe.  
We shall overcome someday.

We shall be as one.

We'll walk hand in hand.  
Justice shall reign supreme.

Another great song from the movement is entitled, " *Keep Your Eye On The Prize* ." This song, like others during this period reminded the protesters of their purpose. It reminded them that they were not suffering in vain. Through their sufferings, they would gain equal rights for themselves and their children.

Hold on. Hold on.  
Keep your eye on the prize.  
Hold on.  
Ain't but one thing that I done wrong,  
Stayed in segregation a bit to long.  
Keep your eye on the prize. Hold on.

During the Civil Rights Movement, many spirituals and gospel songs were adapted to meet the immediate needs of the black community. God was still present in the religious services of the black church, and was

seen as a partner in the struggle. The songs of earlier generations were sung with new lyrics and new meaning. A traditional gospel song entitled, “*I Want Jesus to Walk With Me* ” is presented in its original and revised form:

I want Jesus to walk with me,	I want Jesus to walk with me,
Yes, I want Jesus to walk with me;	Yes, I want Jesus to walk with me;
All along my pilgrim journey,	All along this <i>Freedom</i> journey,
Lord I want Jesus to walk with me.	Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.
Walked with my mother,	Down in the <i>jailhouse</i> ,
Lord, walk with me;	Lord, walk with me.

Walked with my mother, Down in the jailhouse,

Lord, walk with me.	Lord walk with me.
All along my pilgrim journey,	All along this <i>Freedom</i> journey,
Lord I want Jesus to walk with me.	Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.

Woke Up This Morning With My Mind

Woke up this mornin’ with my mind	Woke up this morning with my mind
stayed on Jesus;	stayed on <i>freedom</i> ;
Woke up this morning with my mind	Woke up this morning with my mind
stayed on Jesus;	stayed on <i>freedom</i> ;
Woke up this morning with my mind	Woke up this morning with my mind
stayed on Jesus;	stayed on <i>freedom</i> ;
Hal-le-lu, hal-le lu, hal-le lu-jah!	Hal-le lu, hal-le-lu, hal-le-lu-jah!

The revised lyrics expressed a desire for equal rights and freedom, while counting the cost one might possibly pay for those rights. As I mentioned earlier, God was not excluded from the music of the black church. In many cases, it was not necessary to call his name because he was seen as the leader of the movement. The black church believed that He had ordained their freedom from the beginning. The scriptures taught that He had sent his son to die for every man and that He was no respecter of persons. The church of the 60’s had not forgotten God the deliverer, and put him in the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement.

Both the 19th century “invisible” black church and the black church of the 1960’s were crucial to each impending movement. The music of the black church paralleled the struggles of the people and served as a religious form of the blues. The blues, according to Professor Maurice Wallace of Yale University, is the ability to look

one's condition in the face and to deal with it. The "blues impulse", according to Wallace, is the ability to adapt, to "swing" if you will. The music of the black church afforded its people the ability to use this blues impulse. They looked at their condition in America and dealt with it. Sometimes that meant rebellion, escape or adaptation. If the choice was rebellion, the call was in the song. If the choice was escape, helpful messages could be found in the songs. For those who chose adaptation, there was comfort in the songs. Many of these powerful songs are alive in the memories of our parents, grandparents and those of us who were children in the 1960's. As a teacher, I want to pass these treasures on to my students. If we preserve these songs that sustained our forebears, we can teach our students that they too can face "their blues", whatever they may be, and overcome.

## Lesson Plan 1

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### **Objective:**

Students will recognize Africa as birthplace of mankind. Students will discuss the explorations of Africans into the Americas hundreds of years before Columbus.

### **Procedure:**

Students will read and discuss the information on Africa presented in this unit. Students will discuss King Abubakari's theory of a gourd shaped world and his leadership in the exploration on the "New World." Students will draw pictures, write poetry, songs or short stories to exhibit their knowledge of the information presented.

## Lesson Plan 2

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### **Objective:**

Students will write an original song that reflects his/her blues.

### **Procedure:**

Students will listen to recordings of and sing spirituals and protest songs. Students will be placed in groups of four, where they will examine the lyrics of songs presented. Students will discuss issues that give them the blues such as homework, community violence, responsibility for younger siblings, peer pressure, etc.

Students may use an original composition or may adapt one of the aforementioned songs to reflect their blues. There should be at least four stanzas in each song which will afford each member of the group the opportunity to express herself. Each group will perform their spiritual or protest song for the class.

### **Example:**

Oh Freedom Oh Perseverance  
Oh freedom, Oh perseverance,



Oh freedom,  
Oh freedom over me.  
And before I'll be a slave  
I'd be buried in my grave  
And go home, to my Lord, and be free.

Oh perseverance,  
Oh perseverance over me.  
And before I'd fail this grade,  
On this book my eyes are laid  
Study hard, and I'll get, at least a "B".

## Lesson Plan 3

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### **Objective:**

Students will understand "double entendre" and will identify it in the slave songs of the 1800's.

### **Procedure:**

Students will listen to 19th century spirituals and read corresponding lyrics. Students will search for hidden meaning within the songs. The teacher may also introduce students to songs that are not presented in the unit. Students will be asked to present an argument for the use of double entendre in the lyrics. They must share why they feel this form of "double speak" has been used and share specific lyrics.

## Bibliography

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Allen, William Francis, Garrison, Lucy McKim, Ware, Charles Pickard., *Slave Songs of The United States* . Massachusetts: Applewood Books, 1867.

This is a collection of spirituals and secular songs sung during the days of slavery that allows one to peer into the world of the enslaved African through music. Attempts have been made when possible to describe the appropriate situation for each song.

Cone, James H., *The Spirituals And The Blues* . New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995.

This is a dissertation on the power of spiritual music. It shows how black music helped to preserve black history and culture for future generations in a time when written words were forbidden.

Floyd, Samuel A. Jr., *The Power of Black Music* . New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

This dissertation on the power of spiritual music. It shows how black music helped to preserve black history and culture for generations in a time when written words were forbidden.

Haskins, James., *Black Music In America* . New York: HarperTrophy, 1987.

This book explains the impact black music has had on society from slavery through the twentieth century.

Lincoln, C. Eric & Mamiya, Lawrence H., *The Black Church in the African American Experience* . Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1990.

This book outlines the role the black church has played in black culture. It presents the church's views on the Black Consciousness Movement, as well as The Civil Rights Movement. It examines the church's role in black economics and projects that role in the 21st century.

Mullane, Deidre., *Crossing The Danger Water* . New York: Doubleday, 1993.

This book contains 300 years of black literature. Works by Phyllis Wheatley, Oludah Equiano, black rebels, black revolutionary war soldiers, witnesses at the auction of Thomas Jefferson's daughter and others are presented.

Spencer, Jon Michael., *Protest & Praise* . Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

Protest & Praise's chapters are divided into those containing songs of worship and those containing songs to stir and galvanize the people to action. This book contains lyrics and commentary from the author about the songs' origin and effects on black culture.

Walker, Wyatt Tee., *Somebody's Calling My Name* . Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1979.

This book charts the roots and evolution of black music, from Africa to America. A discussion of black music's significance in society in the past, present and future is presented.

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Brent, Linda., *Incidents in the Life Of a Slave Girl* . New York: Hartcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973.

This slave narrative is written from a female perspective. Linda Brent discusses the particular hardships of being enslaved, being pursued by white males and hated by white females because she was pursued. Selected chapters are appropriate for younger students, however, I would recommend this book for students grades 9-12.

Clark, Margaret Goff., *Freedom Crossing* . New York: Scholastic, 1980.

A young white girl in Virginia aids a 12 year old runaway slave escape to Canada in a trek fraught with perils.

Clayton, Ed., *Martin Luther King: The Peaceful Warrior* . New York: Archway, 1964. This is a biography of Dr. King and his role in The Civil Rights Movement. This warm presentation of an historical giant makes him very human and allows children to see that anyone can become a "King".

Hansen, Joyce., *The Captive* . New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1994.

Kofi, a prince in the Ashanti Kingdom in West Africa, is kidnapped and sold into slavery in the U.S. The story of his life in pre-slavery Africa, gives children a strong appreciation for the richness of the continent and its people prior to the slave trade.

Porter, Connie., *Addy Saves The Day* . WI: Pleasant Company, Inc., 1994.

A story about a little black girl during slavery in America. Addy foils a robbery and recovers the money that was stolen from a church fair.

Stadlehofen, Marcie Miller., *Last Chance For Freedom* . New York: Sundown Books, 1983.

A slave named Gregory joins John Brown's raiders. In a feeble attempt to end slavery, they attack an armory where Brown is captured and Gregory is sold back into slavery. Later, it is arranged for Gregory to escape with the help of a man named Mr. Fairfield.

Stadlehofen, Marcie Miller., *The Freedom Side* . New York: Sundown Books, 1982.

A young girl's father arranges for her to escape from slavery with the help of a white man. Using subterfuge, artifice and numerous ruses, she gains her freedom.

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